

#205 BILL GUERIN: USS *ARIZONA*

--: We'll give her a go. I don't mean to be discouraged, but I have to put this in front for identification.

--: We're up to speed.

--: We're up to speed, okay. ID it.

John Martini (JM): This is December 4, 1991. This is an oral history videotape with Charles William, "Bill," Guerin, survivor of the USS *ARIZONA*. This oral history tape is taking place at the Sheraton Waikiki in Honolulu. It's 7:20 in the evening. The interviewers on this audio tape will be John Martini and Steven Haller of the National Park Service.

On December 7, 1941, Mr. Guerin was a Seaman First Class, assigned to turret number four of the USS *ARIZONA*. He was nineteen at that time. This particular oral history tape is being done in conjunction with the National Park Service and television station KHET in Honolulu.

Well, that's out of the way.

Bill Guerin (BG): All right, okay. All right.

JM: Mr. Guerin, first question, when did you join the Navy and why did you join up?

BG: On the first of October, 1940. And I joined it then because I was eighteen years old and I was a sophomore in high school, and I decided I better do something else. Then, you know, jobs were tough then, back in, you know, in the late thirties, you know, and no one had jobs, so I just decided that was a good place for me to be.

JM: Did you want the Navy more than the Army, or . . .

BG: Definitely. Definitely. I didn't really want no part of them at that time, in that, and it was a good choice.

JM: So when did you join the *ARIZONA*?

BG: That's part of that lost place in there, I was trying to tell you in there. But I figure, I really got to thinking, I think it was some time around March, because the *ARIZONA*, I was on the USS *GILMER*, a four-stacker of World War I, on the Puget Sound. And it anchored out and I could see my house in Ballard, in Seattle. And I made a couple cruises on her and then they started bringing reserves on board. And then picked out the regulars, and they took us to the Bremerton Navy yard. And we were assigned, somewhere in there of March or April, to the USS *ARIZONA*.

JM: She was in Bremerton?

BG: She was in Bremerton then. She had just got overhauled. So it --- we picked it up from there and we loaded her with ammunition and painted, and you know, got her cleaned up after being in dry dock, and got her ready to go to sea.

JM: Was she, at that time, she was assigned to Pacific Fleet, then she just . . .

BG: Right.

JM: . . . went back to Bremerton for overhauling and returned?

BG: Right. She --- and her homeport was Long Beach.

JM: Long Beach?

BG: Yeah, Long Beach, California.

JM: Okay, so you joined her March of '41?

BG: Forty, I'm sorry.

JM: Oh, '40.

BG: Well, March of '41, I got out of the boot camp at the end of November of 1940. So and then, I took the USS *ENTERPRISE*, the old *ENTERPRISE*, and we sailed on there to Bremerton. And we were transferred off, 'cause I believe she was getting ready to go in for some overhaul, at the Bremerton Navy yard there.

JM: So from there you went to the *GILMER*?

BG: Went to the *GILMER*.

JM: And then the *ARIZONA*?

BG: And then the *ARIZONA*. And that was a good thing to get off, because you get awful seasick on one of them out there.

JM: What was the first one, cruise that you took on the *ARIZONA*, right out of the Navy yard.

BG: To Long Beach.

JM: To Long Beach?

BG: Right. And then we stayed there for a little while and then we come on out towards Pearl. And like I found out today, we got here on the twenty-sixth of July, of 1941. I didn't know when it was. So well, really, then at that age, and just going to sea, I don't think you really cared what day it was. Pardon it, but.

JM: So you were, were on the four-stacker . . .

BG: Right.

JM: . . and the battle wagon.

BG: Right.

JM: Guys in the old navy before the war seemed to be very particular about the different types of ships. How would you compare the two? What was your duty?

BG: Well, I didn't want no part of that whole four-stack, World War I destroyer. And I --- and that was a very neat ship. I didn't want no part of that. And you know, 'cause the battlegroup, they pitch. But --- and the storm off the west coast, with that old four-stacker, it went everywhere but loose out there, so I didn't, you know, it was fortunate to get off of it. You didn't know what was afoot down there. They were moving men around then.

Steve Haller: Did you put in for a transfer, or . . .

BG: No, no.

SH: . . . just luck shown on you?

BG: Yeah, luck showed on us. I believe you could call it that. Some of us --- it wasn't turned out to be so lucky.

JM: Good point.

BG: But we sailed --- I told him I sailed with Captain Kidd. (Chuckles)

SH: So how would you kind of typify the *ARIZONA*? Did Kidd run it? Did he run a tight ship?

BG: Oh it was a good tight ship. Very tight. I mean, there was lot of discipline. There was cleaning and scrubbing. The troops were cleaning. You could put your wallet on the people forward, if you had a bunker, whatever, lay it down. It was there when you came back. I don't believe you should do that today. My god. I learned that experience. But it was a very clean ship, well run, and you had old seamen. Then some of them people, they couldn't sign their name to get their pay. They were old seamen from the Asiatic fleet, some of 'em.

SH: China sailors.

BG: China sailors. But boy, they were seamen, and very tough. And when they said do something, you did it. You didn't call your mama or your Congressman.

JM: In those last couple of months, before war broke out, a lot of training was going on. How did it work with the *ARIZONA*? What did they visibly have you doing?

BG: Well, we made a trip to sea and we fired all our main batteries. They were training in night battle and they had just put on what they called a counter mine measure, called [*Degaussing*]. And then this big storm of ours exploded and took off, when the *OKLAHOMA* hit us. That was a very nasty storm.

JM: Do you want to explain the *OKLAHOMA* incident?

BG: Well, the storm was so bad that in the rain and in the dark, I guess we was going one way and she made a turn. And how they can ever get a hold of

that one, but it put quite a hole in this thing. So we lost oil all over the place out there, because we had a lot of fuel on board.

JM: So it burst through the torpedo blister and the fuel bunkers?

BG: Right.

JM: But you said that the (inaudible) here blew up?

BG: It blew it, it arced, you know. It all arced and was just kind of on fire at the time. I was in the main pot, on lookout. I guess, I don't know whether it was the exact time when the *ARIZONA* hit us, or just exactly what it was, but I hope I wasn't the one that didn't see it. So . . .

SH: Yeah. That type of thing doesn't do much for your command futures.

BG: You -- no, no, no. That wasn't --- not so good.

SH: You described how you didn't go much for the pitching and the rolling on a old four-stacker, but being up on the main top of the *ARIZONA* . . .

BG: No, no, no.

SH: . . . in a big storm like that, must have been quite an experience?

BG: Oh, it was. We had to crawl up outside that tripod, the forward tripod.

SH: Yeah.

BG: And there's a ladder, you know, it had rungs you had to get up. And when that wind was blowing and the water would -- it pitched the water, right over the top of the bridge, when they're in the storms, if you headed into the storm. So you had . . .

SH: So you'd get wet climbing several stories above water?

BG: You got wet climbing. I hope you didn't slip off of it, at the time. So it --- for lack of saying, the other historian, he didn't know anything about that hole. Yeah, when we came in, we went into dry dock. They put tarps all over it and Marines all around it and kept everybody away.

JM: So that no one watching would know where, what happened to it?

BG: Right. We'd come right in, went right into dry dock.

SH: When you came on -- excuse me, John.

JM: Go ahead.

SH: When you came on board the *ARIZONA*, what duty were you assigned to?

BG: Sea man, deck.

SH: Okay.

BG: You know, cleaning and climbing up the lines and putting the gangways over. We had the enlisted person and other ones. The admiral's barge and the captain's ladder was on the gangway, was on the starboard side. So we had everything on the port side, people coming and going. We loaded stores, you know, to be put aboard, on the quarterdeck. And then everything was manipulated by bat.

SH: By bat?

BG: Yeah.

SH: Okay. They called that the Norwegian steam, on the west coast, in the merchant marines.

BG: Oh, they do?

SH: Yeah.

BG: Well, we had a large team.

(Laughter)

SH: Where'd you berth? Where was your berth?

BG: In the aft quarter of the port division, from the quarterdeck. You know, the quarterdeck and just forward of turret three, was our compartment, on the port side. That was it.

JM: Below the five-inch guns?

BG: Right. Right below the five-inch. The five-inch twenty-fives, they were. Yeah, five-inch twenty-fives.

JM: Were you also a, then, a gunner at that time, or just a seaman?

BG: No, I was a gunner's mate striker. You know, you could strike to be a Bosun [*Boatswain's*] Mate, a Gunner's Mate, a Quartermaster and I struck for a right arm rate. 'Cause see, all them people had 'em on the right arm then. Gunner's Mates, Bosun [*Boatswain's*] Mates, Quartermasters were all right arm ranks, and all the rest of the ranks were on the left arm.

JM: Did it --- was there a reason you wanted to get into gunnery? Was it an interest?

BG: It was an interest. I was always kind of fascinated with guns and did quite a bit of shooting with my uncle in Idaho, in my younger days, and I thought it was just a good place to be. You needed a strong back and a weak mind to be a gunner's mate and a lot of work, you know. Especially cleaning them barrels out, ramming them and cleaning 'em. So . . .

JM: How was the *ARIZONA* in general, particularly in target practice, when they had to run battery?

BG: They got an E. Marine battery got an E. And I don't remember -- we had, still had them old five-inch broadside, five-inch fifty-ones on board. And I don't know how they did, but I know we got an E.

JM: That was the Marines.

BG: The Marines, yeah. One of my best friends was a Marine on board, but he didn't make it from Long Beach back over here. He was put in the brig, so he didn't make it.

JM: Do you --- speaking of the Marines, was there rivalry between Marines and sailors?

BG: Definitely. And there was very definite rivalry between ships. The *CALIFORNIA* and their rowing crews, their boxing crews, their wrestling crews. Very, very competitive. They don't have none of that competitiveness today. You know, pitting one ship against the other, because the captain wanted the best, you know. It was that type of a service then.

JM: You guys didn't bet on any of this, now, did you?

BG: No, I didn't. I couldn't afford it. When I started out with twenty-one dollars a month. And then I went to thirty-six, then I went to forty-five. And I was mess cooking at the time, because they gave you tips. So you could pick up another twenty, twenty-five dollars every payday.

JM: They gave you tips?

BG: Yeah. Because everybody had to kick in because you were feeding them while they were sitting there.

JM: The rest of the guys in your mess.

BG: Right.

SH: And that was --- they'd hand you money, or they'd sort of give you-- they'd sign a chit of some sort?

BG: No, money. No, you didn't take no IOUs.

SH: All right. Okay. You just said on pay day, so I just . . .

BG: Oh, I'm sorry.

SH: . . . wanted to clarify that. Yeah.

BG: I'm sorry.

JM: Oh, actually we have to stop.

SH: Yeah, fine.

JM: Let's pick up about the tip.

SH: Yeah. Okay. Just tell me when to do it again.

BG: It was a gratuity paid to me or whoever was doing it.

SH: Now rolling.

JM: You are rolling?

SH: Let me just say, did they give you money?

BG: You know, so you could, you know, pick up a little bit of extra money.

SH: Did that mean that they were giving you money or did they -- cash, or did they sign a chit . . .

BG: Cash.

SH: . . . and you picked it up on payday?

BG: Strictly cash and carry.

SH: Cash and carry. Okay. No IOUs.

BG: No IOUs.

SH: All right.

JM: How was Honolulu as a Navy town in those days, when you had time off?

BG: At that time, there was 20,000 sailors in town. And not very many places to go, maybe Wo Fat's or down on Canal [*River*] Street, or Ted Lewis' place. I was a roller skater and I used to roller skate in the skating rink out on the other end, at that time. In fact, we, sometimes, with a couple of beers, we roller skated all over, all the way back downtown then. But that was my thing and I still like to do it.

JM: When you said that there was a lot of rivalry between ships and all that, were there certain bars or places where certain ships would frequent or was it in town that it was pretty free association.

BG: It was pretty free then. You know. Some of the older people did. Of course, when I went to the bar and my friend Teddy Hamilton and the rest, they would say, "How are you," let you look in the door and then throw you out, 'cause we wasn't twenty-one years old. So we got throwed out a lot of bars.

SH: When you talked about rivalry between ships, did *ARIZONA* crew members feel a particular rivalry to a particular ship, or it was just competition throughout?

BG: No, I think it was in general, 'cause we had rowing crews, boxing crews, wrestling crews, and they used to get under the docks, you know. Our motor launches would come out and get us and if there was a bunch from one ship out there or the shore patrol, just pick 'em up in a paddy wagon and dump 'em all out. And when they come to, or whatever, they weren't a bunch of drunks or nothing. Now, don't get me wrong, they just young people having a good time. And a lot of times there was fights. There was always a fight when I went into

the destroyers. One pulled on one side, and one pulled on the other side. It was --- we didn't have enough time to fight among ourselves, I guess, except fight the war too. So that was . . .

JM: When you went into town, did you experience any of the prejudice against enlisted versus officer? Were there certain areas where you couldn't go, because you were enlisted?

BG: No. No, I don't recall nothing like that, so. But it was -- there was a wall there, much more of a wall then than there is today. You mean, between the officers and enlisted personnel. It's much --- it was the elite. They were elite people. And there was a wall there. My division officer was a Lieutenant Chang, Chung [*Chung-Hoon*]? He was a Chinese person, and I think he was the only one in the United States Navy. And he had come from a big family here in Honolulu. Oh, I'm sorry. I asked Andy the guy's name and he put it right out to me and I wanted to remember it.

JM: We'll get it for you. We've got the crew list.

BG: Pardon?

JM: We'll get it for you. We've got the crew list out there.

BG: Okay. But he was a good division officer. Very disciplined.

JM: What kind of punishment would you get if you were found aboard ship, slouching off, doing a minor infraction? What kind of punishment?

BG: The boot.

JM: Really.

BG: Right. On more than one occasion. I was talking to John Anderson out there today and I said, "I'm --- I'll never forgive you because you flemished the lines down at the quarter deck."

He wanted me to pull out the full length of the quarter deck. I weighed 118 pounds. I didn't want to take it all the way down there and pull it, so I just throw it in a pile there and then I'd wind it and flemish it there, on the quarter deck, at the gangway. So he --- I guess we didn't get along too good on that, so he gave me the good duty of scrubbing number four turret off every morning before breakfast.

JM: The whole turret?

BG: The whole turret. So . . .

(Laughter)

BG: And then we only had -- when we come back off of them one maneuvers, we lost three battleships, the *IDAHO*, the *MISSISSIPPI*, and *NEW MEXICO*. They painted all them black and then they took off and we didn't hear from 'em again. And then we was giving forty-eight hours to get our ship all painted the dark color.

JM: Oh, that was the measured one or whatever, it was real dark like blue-gray.

BG: Real dark.

JM: To cover these gray tops?

BG: Right.

JM: When was that? When was that?

BG: Gee, I'm sorry. I can't. That would be before we were hit. I mean, you know, from the *OKLAHOMA*, somewhere then. I'm sorry I can't give you a more definite

JM: Oh, that's okay.

BG: And then the only other duty he give me for doing that, I had the only hatch on the ship for the admiral that had to be brass polished around it every morning. That was the only one on the ship, but that was my duty. So I stayed in trouble, that's

JM: When you were a --- you had just --- my interest, when you guys did go to the different camouflage color, did you go into the yard to do that, or did the crew just turn out to paint?

BG: No, no. We painted it all at sea, before we come in. Most all what was done while we were at sea.

JM: At sea.

BG: We already had the paint started on board.

JM: Oh.

BG: So something, which I don't know about. Why it was there, nor the rest of it.

JM: Let's talk about the -- how did you spend December 6, 1941? What did you do that last day and night?

BG: I went on the beach. I went roller skating and I had my first date with a beautiful Hawaiian-Portuguese girl that I met in the skating rink. That was my first real date, so -- and that was the end of it. I never saw her again. But then we had to be aboard ship, see, because we were below the grade of second class petty officer. And we had port and starboard duty and then you couldn't go off every night, like they do now, unless they've got the duty. And if you didn't have the rank, you couldn't be on the beach after eleven o'clock or twelve o'clock. I don't remember. Twelve o'clock, I believe, maybe the latest.

JM: How did you get back from the date downtown? Did they have buses for you or did you take the train?

BG: They had some buses. And, or you could go back with the shore patrol. You had two choices there, at the time.

JM: Did shore patrol take you back to the ship, or was that -- put you in the brig?

BG: No, they took you out to [*Merry*] Point and dump you out on [*Merry Point*] Landing. And then you had to wait until your launch from each ship came in, you know. And we were tied up out there, at the keys, and each ship has its own launch and would take its own crew back and forth to the ship.

JM: So you were back aboard ship at eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock that night.

BG: Right, somewhere right around there.

SH: Then you turned in and when were you supposed to go back on duty?

BG: Monday.

SH: Monday.

BG: The eighth.

JM: And what were your duties going to be on the seventh?

BG: On the seventh, I was --- I just got through feeding breakfast. So my other two duties would be -- you have this clean sweep down every so many hours because you can't imagine how dirty one of them ships can get at sea, or there. And so you had to clean sweep down three times a day. You had painting to do, or you had to get supplies along side, take them, load 'em on there and take them to wherever they had to go at the time.

SH: So that morning, had you gotten up then to serve breakfast, or more for the events of that . . .

BG: I got up to serve breakfast that morning.

SH: When did you rise, when did you get up that day?

BG: Oh, around six o'clock and then I just finished. I had to get help to hang the tables in the ceiling.

SH: Mm-hm.

BG: So I just finished doing that when somebody came through and they said that, "The Japanese are attacking. The Japanese are attacking."

So I took a run out on the quarterdeck and if I remember right, we still had some awnings up. And we couldn't see very much, except to go all the way out or look to the side and then I believe, we got some strapping down. And then general quarters went.

(Conversation off-mike.)

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JM: So, tell us again, how did you first know that something out of the ordinary was happening that morning? You were cleaning up after mess.

BG: Well, when the man come through from the quarterdeck, through the compartment. And you know, and said we were being attacked, "The Japanese are attacking." And then he went right on through the compartment and went -- I don't know where he went. And that's when I went out, and I believe at the time, some of the canvas started to get riddled up, from strafing or whatever it was.

SH: You were on the port side then?

BG: On the port side.

SH: Port side.

BG: Port side, right. Port side, quarter deck aft.

SH: Okay.

BG: And they were just having services and them people on the fantail was starting to leave the fantail, and the five grazing and they were coming down the quarter deck towards me, and inside the ship, and then went general quarters went then.

JM: Yeah, 'cause you went forward on the port side, right? So you would come down that too?

BG: Well, I was going aft and they were going forward. No, I was leaving . . .

SH: Your battle station was . . .

JM: Oh, . . .

BG: My battle station was at a turret, which is aft.

SH: Right.

BG: Turret with the Fourth Division compartment, turret three and turret four.

JM: Right.

BG: So I was going aft. And everybody done it right then too. When you went to your battle stations, general quarters, abandon ship, you went up starboard and down port.

SH: You're right.

BG: Today, when I was on one, I went on one of the ships, and they had a drill, they went in every direction. I wouldn't know so.

JM: So when you got to the turret, how did you enter? Did you go on your knees and up through the overhang in the rear?

BG: No, we came in from down below deck. We --- there was another way to get in, to man your turret through the passageway, because they had overhead traps through the doorways that they could bring the shells in. So we --- but we, as far as I can figure, and maybe somebody else would verify it, I got the word after general quarters, "All hands lay below deck."

And I've still got that in my mind and I'm not going to change until somebody tells me.

JM: Why did they say lay below deck?

BG: Because we have a six-inch armor deck, and you figured the armor deck would protect us, six inches of steel.

SH: Wouldn't that have --- would that have pertained to the people manning the anti-aircraft guns too?

BG: It was --- it's possible. But I didn't see none of them. When we saw them was after --- that was all fire when we come out of the turret. But somebody, I don't know who it is, come through the passageway and said, "All hands in the fourth division, man your turret." Because somebody figured if there was an invasion, we could still fire those fourteen-inch guns sitting right there in the harbor, 'cause we had enough elevation and range that we could get off on the coastline.

JM: Did you know what was really going on at this time, or kind of in the dark down there?

BG: In the dark.

JM: Oh.

BG: Really in the dark, because we started to lose communications within, you know, maybe seven, eight minutes, one-to-one, number one magazine went off.

JM: Let's go to that moment. It's obviously the transition moment in the *ARIZONA*'s history. What did you hear and what did you feel when the number one magazine went off?

BG: It just shook that whole ship, just raised up and you can't describe it. It's like being -- oh, I can't -- you know, just something that just shook the hell out of you, pardon that. This --- you know, 'cause it was two main explosions, I believe, up forward. But that wasn't --- they weren't really the big ones. The big one never happened until a few minutes later, when we were in turret four.

SH: So before the big explosion, did you feel another?

BG: Twice.

SH: Twice.

BG: Right. The ship, that whole ship, from one end to the other. Now that's the best, you know, that I can recall.

SH: John, help me out -- you would say aft?

JM: She took one long hit aft on the quarter-deck.

BG: That was on the starboard side of turret four, a 500 pounder or something. But that wasn't until later, until we started to come out of the turret.

JM: So you felt two explosions before the big one, definitely two.

BG: Well, the two big ones that shook the whole ship.

JM: Uh-huh.

BG: And then we were in the turret.

JM: You had gone back up into your regular battle stations?

BG: Into our regular battle stations, inside the turret, and that's when that big one, and I never knew until I saw this movie out there, where it lifts the whole, you know, that whole massive explosion just lifts us out of the water.

SH: What happened to you? Did you keep your feet?

BG: We were kind of kneeling down in there anyway. It just, you know, it just shook us all around inside the ready locker. But it's all steel, you couldn't go very far. And then, we stayed in there for a few minutes and I don't know whether Bosun Anderson or somebody else -- you mentioned a name of Malcolm or something, but he was an officer. And he said, "There's nothing else we can do in here," 'cause the water started gurgling up inside the turret. And the first man out of that turret was John Anderson. And I was right behind him. But if I recall, just as we were getting ready to go out, that 500 pound bomb glanced off the port side of turret four.

JM: Went off, basically . . .

BG: Yeah, off the side, because they were this way. There's fourteen inches armor plate there. And that was the admiral's quarters down on the starboard side. That was the admiral's quarters area.

SH: So you're coming out of the aft, under this turret.

BG: Right.

SH: Five-hundred pound hits on the other side.

BG: Right.

JM: You said they had you get out because water was starting to . . .

BG: No, we got up out of there because the turret was useless then.

JM: Mm-hm.

BG: We lost all electrical power so it was a useless force if it was needed then.

SH: Was it pitch black or did you [*have*] emergency lights . . .

BG: We had emergency lanterns. We had waterproof emergency lanterns then. And you just flipped them on. They were battery operated. And that way we could come up out of the turret and come out under the overhang.

And I saw John Anderson just today. You know, about my being there, behind him, very nice. The other guy was third or second, I don't remember for sure. But we got out from under the overhang of the turret and then that other bomb went off, and I don't know what. I think some men was hurt then. And then the people on the starboard side, third division, there was some men coming out through there, from the fire, that were burned, you know, like a baked potato. It was very --- partially on fire, their hair and we tried to give them some consolation, to put them under the turret. And then that's when we went over to get an ax, the people on the *VESTAL* were hollering, because it was getting pretty hot back up there then.

JM: Did you know when you came out of turret number three, how bad it had been?

BG: No.

JM: Turret number four.

BG: Not until we saw all that fire.

SH: You looked forward.

BG: Forward.

SH: You looked forward . . .

BG: Yes.

SH: . . . at that time.

BG: Leaned forward and we couldn't even see the *TENNESSEE*, 'cause we couldn't see it, they were on the *VESTAL* to see the *WEST VIRGINIA*, but we could see the *TENNESSEE*, 'cause she was inboard, like we were, kind of more of at an angle. And all that fire was going there and all that oil was starting to burn.

SH: Can you describe it when you looked forward?

BG: It was a total shock. I don't believe I was very scared. I'm still to this day not a, you know, a panicky type person. It stopped you in disbelief. Let's put it that way. 'Cause it is a shock when you're nineteen years old and you're faced with an unknown you don't know nothing about. You wasn't trained for that kind of a situation. You know you have drills, you have this. You're not prepared for nothing like that.

So that's when we cut the *VESTAL* loose. I believe we tried to get one of the few life rafts that was still on the main top. They were latched up on the sides and I think there were still some Marines up there, was still trying to fire. They had -- the Marines had the fifty calibers then. So, well, you kind of get foggy in there in a way, after fifty years, so

JM: You cut the *VESTAL* loose?

BG: Yeah. We cut --- the bosun on the *VESTAL* cut the forward lines loose, when they blew up over there. And I asked the man last night, downstairs, I said, "How did you feel, what was you doing when that *ARIZONA* blew all up in the air and took you with it."

He said, "It just pulled us up out of the water and just shook us."

And they were scared then. I guess then the fire was getting a good start also. And the fire was really getting a good start because of the paint. The paint was so thick on them walls, it's all lead paint, and the heat. And then it just smolders, then the fumes will kill you in just a very short time, from the lead in it. I didn't know all that then either.

JM: Could you feel the heat from back at the quarter deck?

BG: Oh, definitely. When we cut the *VESTAL* loose, we could feel the heat. And [*Lieutenant*] Commander Fuqua was out there, directing everything he could on the starboard side and port side of the quarter deck, forward of turret three. And that was where he, I guess, my buddy, Teddy Hamilton and Garth Anderson, and I can't remember who else it was -- they come out. And they requested permission to abandon ship and [*Lieutenant*] Commander Fuqua gave the word to abandon ship at that time. So then we went on over the side, and into the water. And that fire and oil was starting to move back towards the fantail and the quarterdeck, and it was getting pretty warm in the oil and the water. And then we saw the captain's gig, so we swam to the captain's gig and we got on top, and we were all right. And then the engine started all right, but it cut right out, because there were some cables wrapped around, lines, rope or something, that somebody got careless with. And we figured if we could get on that, we could go back and get some of the people that might not have been able to swim that far. So we gave that up, because we couldn't get her going. We dove over trying to get some of the lines out and I believe Andy did.

JM: That was folded on top.

BG: Yeah, but we couldn't get it loose. And then we were getting a little panicky anyway. We figured we better start heading for shore and at that time, I thought that shore was a mile away, until I come out and visited the *ARIZONA*, I didn't realize it was so close. But under them circumstances and swimming through it, that was an awful long ways away.

JM: Was there burning oil around you, when this . . .

BG: Yeah, it just come, it was flowing towards us all the time and some of it we had to spatter out. Never got real thick in there yet. It was starting to come into us. And then we went over and started on the beach, and I remember seeing a man, he was still alive, he didn't have no legs. He was over on Ford Island, over towards the *TENNESSEE*. I don't know if he was blown off there, or

off of our ship. And was nothing we could do with that. And so we just kind of stood there and watched the ship and all that burning, and then the *TENNESSEE* was starting to catch up there too. She was catching all that heat and the rest of it. And then we decided that maybe we better get out of there.

So the first thing we did, we were hungry. We were all covered with oil. We had shorts on and t-shirts. And so we decided we knew there was housing over there, captains, commanders and admirals. So we went in the first house, and we went in the refrigerator. And we were looking for water, but I don't even remember any water pressure. I don't think there was any.

JM: You know why?

BG: Why?

JM: Took the water pipe out when the *ARIZONA* blew up.

BG: Oh yeah? I never knew that. Well, we were getting thirsty, but some of 'em had pop, some of 'em had milk. And then, we picked up some arms from them officers had their forty-fives over there. They never --- they were all issued forty-fives then. So we all had --- one of us had two forty-fives and I don't know who else. I can't remember who all was with us. But then pretty soon, some of us had captain's coats and some of us had commander's coats and carrying forty-fives and all greasy, and trying to get something to eat and then go to see what was going on.

SH: Were the planes still going over by then, or you don't really recall the planes too much?

BG: I don't really recall that. I know Ford Island was still blowing. Planes were still going and, you know, some of them were still burning and blowing up, or whatever. Ammunition they had on board. But at that time, it was a point of survival. We were buddies, we were all stuck together, though.

But when we headed down towards Ford Island, towards -- I believe they had a Marines barracks there also, and other enlisted barracks and a swimming pool. So we headed in that direction, but the Marines were armed and on guard duty. So they said, "Who are you? Where you coming from?"

You know, they were real touchy. They could tell -- I don't know for sure -- but they took our forty-fives away from us and then they ushered us to one of the buildings over there where they had sandwiches and pop. And that was the best we could do at the time. There was no water, except out in the Marines' swimming pool, or somebody's swimming pool. But it was a source of water.

JM: What did they put you to do after . . .

BG: They --- as soon as they rounded us up over there as quick as they give us something to eat and some pop to drink, and the rest of it, they said, "All personnel are gunner's mates," or gunner's mates, strikers, to go down to where our buildings were along the way there -- 'cause they had fifty caliber's, thirty caliber's, B.A.R.s, Air Corps fifties from PBYS, and the rest of it. So we went in and brought them out, put 'em together as fast as we could and cleaned 'em up. We got what ammunition that we could get, and then we started

to mount them guns up on the roofs of the building at Ford Island. So we were very well armed by that evening. A lot of guns up there. And our own firing time came in, when Admiral Halsey sends his planes in. And I guess that we put a very heavy fire between our side of the harbor and the destroyers and other ships that was on the other side of the harbor there. And if I recall, I think we shot down about six of them.

JM: No one had alerted you guys that . . .

BG: No.

JM: . . . planes were going to land.

BG: No. No communications. And finally somebody come running down in front of the buildings, hollering, "Friendlies, friendlies, friendlies. Cease fire." I don't know who it was. And then we finally ceased fire, but you was all real kind of trigger happy by then.

But they were pretty well disciplined too. You know, we were pretty well trained then. They pounded it into you. So I believe that our recovery, that quick, if there had been any more waves come in, I don't think they'd ever made it. I really don't, even with all the damage. 'Cause there was --- we got in pretty good shape then, so.

JM: What was the general feeling among the people on top, the guys from *ARIZONA*, the other battleships, everyone around the harbor? Mad?

BG: Very bitter. Very, very bitter. But most of us at the time and still today feel that due to some great dereliction, that we should have been alerted. If we had fifteen minutes, if we had thirty minutes, and which I read the paper, just before I came over here, about the orders from Washington to General Short. And General Short, I believe, was really the ranking commanding officer at the time, because they had the defense of the island.

SH: Right.

BG: But at that time, I didn't know that. And Admiral Kimmel. And so to this day, I wasn't real bitter -- most of us were pretty bitter about not having any type of notification. And when you learn more about it, as the years go by, it was just a lot of somebody was short that should have got court marshaled, or I -- you know. It was serious to lose that many men, you know, and derelict in duty, as a military man.

JM: How did you feel about the Japanese that day?

BG: Well, we were very sore then. But I couldn't --- that little friend I told you about, I didn't tell you, I made him and his dad work in the shipyard. He was ten years old. I made him a pair of roller skates. Detachable roller skates that you could take and go roller skating with.

SH: And this little friend was Japanese, Hawaiian?

BG: A Japanese boy, but I can't remember his name. But I took a liking to him and I gave him gum and, you know, whatever else I had, and the roller skates. I made 'em for him.

SH: So did you make an association between the Japanese in Hawaii and the people that attacked you?

BG: No. I didn't, they kept us so busy in getting us ready to get on them destroyers, and getting position on there. Get --- we had to go back to [Merry Point] Landing then, at the reception center. We had to get dungarees. We had to get shirts. We had to try to get pay, you know, to give us a little bit of pay. They took all the time to find out what ship you was on. My dad was notified that I was lost at Pearl Harbor, on the first messages that went out, until we were rounded up and put in there, then they sent another message back to my dad.

JM: When you go back to the memorial, what's it like today?

BG: It's very touching. The first time I went out there, I saw it from Pier 8, before I went over to visit the ship and I got tears in my eyes thinking about it, and I said a little prayer to myself. And then when I went over to the memorial, well, no, you had a young lady here, in the park service. She took me under her wing and she said, "Does anybody here know anything about the attack on Pearl Harbor or what day, or what time?"

And I said, "Yes, ma'am, 7:55, December 7."

Excuse me. So she come around to me and I showed her my cards and she introduced me to the audience and had me stand up. And they all clapped and I cried. I have to say I don't do that very often, but just the thought of it and then going to the memorial, and looking down and thanking the good lord that I was able to survive it and to, you know, be married for forty-eight years and have my four children and my family. (Knocking in background) And made me appreciate it more. And of course, I appreciate it more now than ever. You know, I'm getting older anyway. But it did. I just -- my wife had tears in her eyes on the boat yesterday. And she came back, and they introduced me on the boat coming back. I can't remember the ranger's name now. But he introduced me on the boat coming back and the two men off the *PENNSYLVANIA*. And my wife broke down, and so did I, 'cause the people -- most of the time, when you're in the military, or the war, whatever you do, most people say, "Well, that was your duty. That was your job." And it's been very touching, on all three of my trips over here, to be treated that way by everybody.

And last time I was here, the first ones that got up in the back and said, "May I have your picture," was little Japanese girl and her husband. And they were the first ones. And then also on the boat going out. But I was --- I felt like Bush. I signed so many autographs and pictures and it was overwhelming to be treated that way.

SH: You shared with us before your desires were for the future, I guess you might say. Could you just say a little something about what your arrangements with the *ARIZONA* Memorial, if you don't mind?

BG: My arrangements?

SH: Well, I'm driving at . . .

BG: Burial?

SH: Yeah.

BG: I've had the paperwork for quite some time. But my wife wasn't really sure of it. She said, "Well, where am I going to be buried?"

My daughter got into it and my youngest son got into it. And my other daughter. And they said, "Well, we don't think you should."

But it's been discussed for quite a long time. But the decision was made just before we came over here and especially when my wife saw the memorial, and to have the honor of being buried on a national memorial. So I just --- it would be an honor and I told the people on the *CARL VINSON*, I said, "Remember this, when you go by and you all come to attention, I'm down there."

I won't reflect to do what I said at the time, but I just -- it's all settled now. So, if I get the paperwork -- I might even go over there and fill it out in the office while I'm here. But I believe that it would be an honor to be, you know, to be buried aboard it. So all the family is agreed to that point. So I just, I'm planning on that.

SH: Yeah. I think it's an honor well deserved, Mr. Guerin.

JM: Honor to meet you.

BG: Pardon?

JM: Honor to meet you.

BG: I thank you very much.

JM: Thank you.

BG: And this is a total honor to me, really it is, because I put twenty-two years in. I went into the Air Force, and I stayed inside for almost sixteen years. But I've been in a lot of places and seen a lot of men that, you know, you're doing your duty, that was your war, that was your choice to be a soldier, or a sailor, or an airman. So I just hope that the people remember it. The more people in the wars are forgotten -- the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and you know, the public usually forgets it. But this is just one place that keeps 'em going. And I was just amazed when I was here before, that the number of people that come from everywhere, that go to the memorial to visit it. And that movie is touching. I mean, it can get to you. But from everywhere, all over the world. And I know people that's been here five and six times, and every time they come to the memorial. So I just say it's -- to put me there would be fine. I just hope I can stay out of there for a few more years.

SH: Yeah, we're in no hurry.

BG: No.

SH: Let's clarify that for the record. You had a rather interesting naval career after the *ARIZONA*. I don't know, John, do you want to keep going on the *ARIZONA* a bit, or maybe?

JM: In five minutes . . .

SH: Five minutes.

JM: . . . why don't --- following the attack on the Pearl Harbor, when you were assigned to the destroyer . . .

BG: *MacDONOUGH*, 351.

JM: And you escorted the carrier *SARATOGA*.

BG: Well, we were the first battle group -- task force, they called 'em then. They call 'em battle groups now, but task force. Task force eleven, I believe it was. And we were the first task force to head out south. At one time, I believe, we put planes and was trying to reinforce Wake Island with P-40s. We tried to attack Truk, early in 1942, with two carriers, three or four cruisers and with the squadron of the *MacDONAUGH* class, I mean, *FARRAGUT* class destroyers, 'cause we had five five-inch thirty-eights. We carried lots of fuel and not enough food. But then, just as we steamed top speed -- I don't know, it was in April or somewhere in there, early March, somewhere -- and we was going to make an attack on Truk. And then, a plane spotted this, and then they started sending them Betty bombers out from Truk and all through there, and attacked us. And that's when O'Hara, Lieutenant O'Hara was the first air ace. And he shot down, I don't know, five or six of 'em. And that's when we found out that our ammunition, only about every third one was exploding in the air. That's what happened to the *HONOLULU*. They didn't explode and just come out right down again. But then we just ran in all directions then because they had land-based bombers, and they sent everything at us.

SH: Since we --- excuse me for interrupting. Since we only have a few minutes more on this tape, you mentioned a very interesting incident with your destroyer and its involvement in the torpedoing of the *SARATOGA*. Do you think you can get that one in?

BG: Oh, I'll try to evaluate it. It came to the watch and we were zigzagging very slowly. And one of the men coming off the watch, he saw that black and white periscope coming right straight at us. Somebody on the bridge didn't holler. We were changing watch, they come underneath us. I believe the periscope scraped the bottom and I was on gun watch on number four gun, which was on the top of the wall deck, what they called it, kind of like. And five torpedoes went off from underneath. The air pressure from all them torpedoes just lifted us out of the water, almost. And then, all five of them torpedoes started heading at the *SARATOGA*. And I believe only one of them hit her, though, on the spread. But the man that was on the bridge and he was hollering, "Fire, fire."

Well, we couldn't fire, we could have hit the *SARATOGA*. And then the depth charges were set shallow and then the torpedo man on the fantail kept them from rolling out, 'cause it would have blowed us right out of the water. We could have probably got the submarine, but we had to sacrifice us and the ship also. But then we started dropping all the depth charges that we could get and I'm sure that we got it. 'Cause they had broken our stream, around him then. So that it was just one of them incidents. And then finally we went to the Aleutians, and we were cut in half. We lost a destroyer and they sent us

to find it and we found it. World War I four stacker with that sharp bow hit us right in mid-ships. We were up there to attack that too and that. So I made it all the way through and I'm just very fortunate I went all the way through that war too. So that would bring it down and whatever else I could try to give to you.

SH: Well, you've given us more than enough today to chew on and I really appreciate your time and your stories very much.

BG: All right.

JM: Thank you very much.

BG: Okay. Okay. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW